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APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT
FOR
APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR HANDOFF IN A WIRELESS NETWORK

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APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR HANDOFF IN A WIRELESS NETWORK

BACKGROUND

Some communication systems involve two or more master devices that provide communication between a slave device and a network. To reduce the risk of neighboring master devices interfering with each other, the master devices may use different hopping sequences that vary the transmission frequency of the master device over time so that neighboring master devices are likely to be transmitting at a different frequency.

If the slave device is a mobile device, it may be necessary or desirable to transfer responsibility for maintaining communication between the slave and the network to the master device that is the closest to the slave device. However, this may difficult to do if neighboring master devices are transmitting with different hopping sequences. This is further complicated by many of the rules and regulations that govern the operation of communication systems. For example, in a Bluetooth™ network, Federal Communication Commission (FCC) part 15, section 247 specifically prohibits any form of central control to coordinate the hopping sequences used by the various master devices in the network. (note: Bluetooth™ is a registered trademark of Bluetooth SIG, Incorporated.). The rules require that sequences be chosen independently of one another.

Thus, there is a continuing need for better ways to provide handoff between

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master devices in communication networks that employ frequency hopping

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The subject matter regarded as the invention is particularly pointed out and distinctly claimed in the concluding portion of the specification. The invention, however, both as to organization and method of operation, together with objects, features, and advantages thereof, may best be understood by reference to the following detailed description when read with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram representation of a communication network in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram representation of a portion of a transmitting device in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 3 is a flow chart illustrating a method that may be performed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

It will be appreciated that for simplicity and clarity of illustration, elements illustrated in the figures have not necessarily been drawn to scale. For example, the dimensions of some of the elements are exaggerated relative to other elements for clarity. Further, where considered appropriate, reference numerals have been repeated among the figures to indicate corresponding or analogous elements.

may be used with programs in accordance with the teachings herein, or it may prove convenient to construct a more specialized apparatus to perform the desired method. The desired structure for a variety of these systems will appear from the description below. In addition, embodiments of the present invention are not

5 described with reference to any particular programming language. It will be appreciated that a variety of programming languages may be used to implement the teachings of the invention as described herein.

In the following description and claims, the terms "coupled" and "connected," along with their derivatives, may be used. It should be understood that these terms are not intended as synonyms for each other. Rather, in particular embodiments, "connected" may be used to indicate that two or more elements are in direct physical or electrical contact with each other. "Coupled" may mean that two or more elements are in direct physical or electrical contact. However, "coupled" may also mean that two or more elements are not in direct contact with each other, but yet still co-operate or

15 interact with each other.

It should be understood that embodiments of the present invention may be used in a variety of applications. Although the present invention is not limited in this respect, the circuits disclosed herein may be used in many apparatuses such as in the transmitters and receivers of a radio system. Radio systems intended to be included

20 within the scope of the present invention include, by way of example only, cellular radiotelephone communication systems, satellite communication systems, two-way radio communication systems, one-way pagers, two-way pagers, personal

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the invention. However, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known methods, procedures, components and circuits have not been described in detail so as not to obscure the present invention.

Some portions of the detailed description that follows are presented in terms of algorithms and symbolic representations of operations on data bits or binary digital signals within a computer memory. These algorithmic descriptions and representations may be the techniques used by those skilled in the data processing arts to convey the substance of their work to others skilled in the art.

An algorithm is here, and generally, considered to be a self-consistent sequence of acts or operations leading to a desired result. These include physical manipulations of physical quantities. Usually, though not necessarily, these quantities take the form of electrical or magnetic signals capable of being stored, transferred, combined, compared, and otherwise manipulated. It has proven convenient at times, principally for reasons of common usage, to refer to these signals as bits, values, elements, symbols, characters, terms, numbers or the like. It should be understood, however, that all of these and similar terms are to be associated with the appropriate physical quantities and are merely convenient labels applied to these quantities.

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Unless specifically stated otherwise, as apparent from the following discussions, it is appreciated that throughout the specification discussions utilizing terms such as "processing," "computing," "calculating," "determining," or the like, refer to the action and/or processes of a computer or computing system, or similar electronic computing device, that manipulate and/or transform data represented as physical, such as electronic, quantities within the computing system's registers and/or memories into other data similarly represented as physical quantities within the computing system's memories, registers or other such information storage, transmission or display devices.

Embodiments of the present invention may include apparatuses for performing the operations herein. This apparatus may be specially constructed for the desired purposes, or it may comprise a general purpose computing device selectively activated or reconfigured by a program stored in the device. Such a program may be stored on a storage medium, such as, but is not limited to, any type of disk including floppy disks, optical disks, CD-ROMs, magnetic-optical disks, read-only memories (ROMs), random access memories (RAMs), electrically programmable read-only memories (EPROMs), electrically erasable and programmable read only memories (EEPROMs), magnetic or optical cards, or any other type of media suitable for storing electronic instructions, and capable of being coupled to a system bus for a computing device.

The processes and displays presented herein are not inherently related to any particular computing device or other apparatus. Various general purpose systems

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communication systems (PCS), personal digital assistants (PDA's) and the like. In addition, embodiments of the present invention may be used in accordance with a variety of communication specifications such as Bluetooth TM, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802.11, and any system that employs frequency hopping; although it should be understood that the scope of the present invention is not limited to these examples.

Turning to FIG. 1, an embodiment 100 in accordance with the present invention is described. Embodiment 100 may be a communication system that may include master devices 30-31 to provide communication to or from a slave device 40 and a network 60. Although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect, network 60 may be, for example, the internet, an intranet, a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), a computer, or a peripheral device (e.g. printer, storage device, etc.). Generally speaking, network 60 may be any device, component, or system, with which slave device 40 may be in communication.

As shown in FIG. 1, master devices 30-33 may be connected to each other and to network 60 through any combination of wired or wireless communications. For example, master devices 30-33 may be connected together in a LAN or WAN arrangement. While in operation, one or more of master devices 30-33 may be providing communication between slave 40 and network 60. For example, master devices 30-31 may be any combination of access points, base stations, terminals, servers, network node, etc. Although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect, master devices 30-33 may rely on wireless communication to provide

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information between network 60 and slave 40 allowing slave 40 to be mobile and yet maintain communication with network 60.

In this particular embodiment, it may be desirable that each of master devices transmit on a different frequency to reduce the risk that masters 30-33 interfere with each other. It may also be desirable to have the transmission frequency of masters 30-33 change with time (e.g. frequency hopping) to reduce the risk that the communication interferes with, or encounters interference from neighboring communication sources. Accordingly, master devices 30-33 may be adapted to use a hopping sequence that determines the transmission frequency of each master device 30-33 over time, although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect.

To facilitate the mobility of slave 40 while in communication with network 60 it may be desirable that the communication between slave 40 and network 60 be provided with the master device 30-33 that is closest to slave 40 or that is receiving the strongest/clearest signal from slave 40. However, as slave 40 moves, the strength of the communication signal(s) between slave 40 and the master device 30-33 with which it is in communication may change. For example, as shown in FIG. 1, as slave 40 moves in the direction indicated with an arrow 25, it may be desirable to transfer responsibility for the communication between slave 40 and network 60 (i.e. handoff) from master 33, then to master 32, then to master 31, etc. Techniques for performing this are described below.

Turning briefly to FIG. 2, an example of a communication device 200 that may be used in accordance with embodiments of the present invention is provided. The block

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diagram of communication device 200 may represent components of either a master transmitting device (e.g. a master like master devices 30-31), a slave transmitting device (e.g. a slave device like slave device 40), or both. Communication device 200 may include a processor 210 that may be used to execute instructions. For example, the instructions might be used to perform the communication to or from the network, determine if responsibility for maintaining communication should be transferred to another master, or facilitate the transfer of communication responsibility, although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect.

The instructions to be executed by processor 210 may be stored in a memory 220. Memory 220 may comprise a variety of memory types such as one or more or those listed above. Communication device 200 may also comprise a transceiver 230 that may be coupled to an antennae 240. Transceiver 230 may allow communication device 200 to perform wireless communication to other devices (e.g. other master or slave devices). Although the scope of the present invention is not limited this respect, communication device 200 may employ a communication protocol such as, for example, Bluetooth™, IEEE 802.11, etc., to allow communication device 200 to communicate with master devices, slave devices, or a network(s).

Turning now to FIG. 3, a method for performing a handoff between two masters in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention is provided. In this particular example it is assumed that master device 32 is currently providing communication to and/or from slave 40 and network 60 (see FIG. 1). However, as slave device 40 moves, it may be desirable to transfer responsibility for maintaining the

communication to other master devices (e.g. master 31 or 33).

This process may begin, for example, with master device 32 monitoring the strength of the communication signal(s) between master device 32 and slave 40, block 300. Although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect, if communication system 100 is a Bluetooth™ network, master device 32 may use its receive strength signal indicator (RSSI) capability. Alternatively, master device 32 may track the strength of the communication signal(s) from slave 40 real-time or periodically to monitor the movement of slave 40 with respect to master device 32.

If the master 32 is on the verge of losing communication with slave 40 (e.g. the strength of the received signal is becoming too weak), then master device 32 may sense the degraded communication (block 310) as part of a process for transferring communication responsibility, block 310. For example, master device 32 may be programmed with an acceptable range or a predetermined threshold (e.g. minimum) of acceptable signal strength or maximum bit error rate for normal operation. It should be noted that this range or threshold may vary depending perhaps on the performance desired for communication system 100 or the characteristics of the master or slave devices in the system. Alternatively, slave device 40 may inform master 32 that the strength of the communication signal(s) it is receiving from master 32 is approaching a predetermined threshold. Thus, before communication is lost, responsibility for maintaining communication between slave device 40 and network 60 may be transferred to another master device (e.g. master device 31 or 33).

Master device 32 may then poll the other master devices in communication

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network 100 to determine if one of the other master devices can communicate with slave device 40, block 320. If one of the other master devices (e.g. master device 31 or 33) can communicate better with slave device 40, it may be appropriate to transfer the communication. Although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect, master 32 may, facilitate determination of communication quality with slave 40 by sending a packet across communication network 100 informing the other master devices (e.g. master 30, 31, and 33) of the communication characteristics of slave device 40. For example, master 32 may notify the other master devices of the hopping sequence, time slot identification information, timing information, identification codes, etc. relevant for receiving signals from slave device 40. Alternatively, master 32 may provide the other master devices with its own communication characteristics so that the other master devices may more closely emulate the operation of master 32.

However, it should be understood that the scope of the present invention is not limited to embodiments where all or only this information is communicated to the other master devices. Likewise the scope of the invention is not limited to embodiments where the master device communicates through wired connections (e.g. a local area network). In alternative embodiments, the communication characteristics may be provided to the other master device through a wireless communication or a combination of wired and wireless communications.

Master devices 30, 31, and 33 may then use the communication characteristics provided by network 60 or master device 32 to determine if they are able to communicate with slave device 40, block 330. For example, master devices 30, 31,

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and 33 may use an auxiliary receiver to determine the relative strength of, or bit error rate present on, the communication signal(s) received from slave 40 using all or some of the communication characteristics, although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect. In alternative embodiments, master devices 30, 31, and 33 may
5 alter their own communication characteristics (e.g. hopping sequence, time slot, etc.) and then determine if they are receiving a communication signal(s) from slave device 40 that is of an acceptable level.

If any of master devices 30, 31, or 33 are able to communicate with slave device 40, they may inform network 60 or master device 32 that responsibility to maintain the communication with slave 40 may be transferred to them. If so, the master device (e.g. master 30, 31, or 33) that is able to communicate with slave device 40 may notify master 32 of its particular communication characteristics, block 340. For example, master 30, 31, or 33 may inform master 32 of its hopping sequence, time slot identification information, timing information, identification
15 codes, etc., or any information relevant for communicating with slave device 40, although the scope of the present invention is not limited in this respect. Alternatively, master devices 30, 31, or 33 may alter its transmission characteristics so that it is able to communicate with slave device 40, if permitted.

Master device 32 may then inform slave device 40 of the communication
20 characteristics of master device 30, 31, or 33 as a way of notifying that slave device 40 should begin communicating with network 60 through a different master device. Slave device 40 may then alter its communication characteristics so that it is able to

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communication with the new master device (e.g. master device 30, 31, or 33), block 350. With this information, responsibility for providing communication between network 60 and slave device 40 may be transferred to a master device that is able to receive signal(s) from slave 40 despite its movement.

5 Thus, slave 40 may be provided with the communication characteristics (e.g. hopping sequence) of another master transmitting device so that slave device 40 may be able to maintain communication with network 60. It should be noted that the particular embodiment shown in FIG. 3 is able to provide for the handoff of a slave device between different master devices without the use of a central control unit. Although the scope of the present invention is not limited to exclude a central control unit, it should be noted that such an embodiment complies with many of the rules and regulations governing wireless communication networks.

15 While certain features of the invention have been illustrated and described herein, many modifications, substitutions, changes, and equivalents will now occur to those skilled in the art. For example, in alternative embodiments, network 60 or communication system 100 may maintain a table of nearest neighbors that is periodically updated to indicate the relative ability of other master transmitting devices to communicate with the slave device. Such an embodiment may be desirable to reduce the amount of time or processing power of the master devices
20 that is used to determine to which other master device should be used to communicate with the slave device.

In addition, the scope of the present invention is not limited to embodiments

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where the slave device is moving. In alternative embodiments it may be desirable to transfer responsibility for maintaining communication with a slave device to other master devices for such reasons as power consumption, noise, interference, traffic load balancing, etc. It is, therefore, to be understood that the appended

5 claims are intended to cover all such modifications and changes as fall within the true spirit of the invention.

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